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Ministry of Attorney General
and Minister responsible for Multiculturalism

AMENDMENTS PRESERVE RURAL REPRESENTATION

VICTORIA – Government will preserve the existing number of members of the legislative assembly (MLAs) from rural areas of the province, while permitting the BC Electoral Boundaries Commission to add MLAs in areas experiencing population growth.

Bill 39, the Electoral Boundaries Commission Amendment Act, 2007, introduced today, instructs the commission to recommend 87 electoral districts, up from the current 79. It follows on a commitment by Premier Gordon Campbell this September to provide new instructions and legal tools to the Electoral Boundaries Commission to ensure voters in all regions have effective representation in the legislative assembly.

The proposed amendments direct the commission to retain the current number of electoral districts in three regions. The north will keep eight MLAs, the Cariboo-Thompson five MLAs and the Columbia-Kootenay four MLAs. The commission will be given an additional eight seats to allocate elsewhere in the province. This increase gives the commission the ability to better achieve parity of voting power and effective representation, without significantly increasing the size of the legislative assembly.

The report will be prepared in advance of the scheduled 2009 general election and referendum on electoral reform and contain proposed electoral boundaries for the current voting system, known as the single member plurality (SMP) system, and the single transferable vote (STV) system. The new legislation will apply to both voting systems.

The commission will have until Jan. 31, 2008 to release a revised preliminary report on the new boundaries, with the final report due by April 15, 2008. This will allow time for the report to be introduced into the legislature during the spring session for debate and vote. If passed, the new map would be in place in time for the 2009 provincial general election.

The Electoral Boundaries Commission Act requires that a new commission be appointed within one year after every second provincial election. The commission reviews electoral boundaries and makes recommendations to the legislative assembly, taking into account population, geography, history and community interests.

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Premier Campbell's letter to Speaker Bill Barisoff, outlining government's intentions to introduce legislative amendments to the Electoral Boundaries Commission Act, is available online at: www.mediaroom.gov.bc.ca/DisplayEventDetails.aspx?eventId=391

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